

THE DOG-DEITY: DIVINITY, HISTORY AND DOGS IN ANCIENT SCRIPTURES

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ABSTRACT

A sub specie of wolf that was domesticated came to be known as 'Dog'. History suggests that Dogs have been human companions since Adams. They have been with humans and have been an integral part of their culture, lives, leanings extending to them emotional support, spiritual enrichment and adding to their very being. Based on DNA evidence, the wolf ancestors of modern dogs diverged from other wolves about 1,00,000 years ago, and dogs were domesticated about 15,000 years ago. Keeping in mind this date, it can be said with utmost certainty dogs were the first to be domesticated by humans and human-dog bond has its historical base. The relationship between human beings and dogs has deep roots, with archaeological and genetic evidence indicating a time of domestication in the late Upper Paleolithic Age, between 17,000 and 14,000 years ago. Dogs have been an important part of both Hinduism and Buddhism. They have been glorified and appreciated in various ancient texts. With time we have become cruel towards dogs for no reason. A mass killing of dogs in Kerala has jolted many of us. We as humans are said to have "Viveka" and yet an event like "war against canines" in Kerala talks about our low spiritual levels and our avidya. It is time that we realize how dogs have been a part of our age old history, philosophy, literature, art, yoga, dance and they still continue contribute to us medically, emotionally, physically, spiritually and by serving our nation. Is it not time that we rise above variations of forms and see the Brahman that exists within all, including dogs. It is time we go back to our texts and understand them in the right light so that we do not fail to give the respect dogs, animals and even humans deserve. We need to question ourselves whether or not with time we have touched higher planes of spirituality or have merely become slaves to names, forms and materialism? Should we respect and love dogs only because they serve us, only because they are or they can be of use to us? Only because our ancient texts talk highly of them, should we be bound to give them respect? Is their very being not enough or not a reason enough to love them, respect them and cherish them? While dogs continue to submit unconditionally and love humans, when will we humans offer our bhoota rinn to our four legged friends? This paper aims at digging into the past and bringing to fore references that glorify dogs in Hindu and Buddhist traditions besides which it will also throw light on how dogs have significantly added to literature, art and architecture.

DOGS IN HINDUISM

Dogs, popularly known as Kutta in India and medically a member of the Genus Canis. Dogs share their past with the wolves and are called wolf-like canids (the canid subfamily Caninae). In Sanskrit Dogs have been bestowed with some of the most philosophical and divine names, ie: Śvan, Kukurah, Grāmsimhaḥ (village lions), Śīghracetanah (early risers), Sarama (Daughter of Gandharva), Deva-Suni (The one who recovered the cows stolen by Panis, thieves who appeared as a purohita, Rig Veda: Vol.10, 108).

Dogs have not only induced love compassion and loyalty in our hearts but have also significantly added to art, yoga, architecture, literature and have been glorified in our ancient texts. Dogs are found decorating the Indian literature, paintings, and sculptures. In yoga, the Adho-Mukha-Shavasana is a yogic pose dedicated to “Śvan/Dog”. Dogs have also left their mark on our history. Dating back to Mohenjo Daro, A number of terracotta dog figures have been found at Harappa and at other Indus sites. Dog figures that are decorated with collars signify their domestication. Along with human remains a large number of dog remains have also been found in excavated sites belonging to different periods including the Mesolithic, Harappan, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Iron Age and Early Historic eras. Dogs are fondly found in the prehistoric paintings of the upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Chalcolithic periods at Bhimbetka, a district of Madhya Pradesh (7000 BCE) Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1984).

According to Marshall and Mackay (l. c.) dogs might have been objects of worship. The present untouchability of dogs could originate from their being sacred and thus untouchable.

Dogs find a mention in the world's oldest text-the Rig Veda. Sarama, the mother of all dogs is the subject of a Rig-Vedic legend (1700–1100 BCE), which is related many times in the Veda, including the 1st (1.62.3, 1.72.8), 3rd (3.31.6), 4th (4.16.8) and 5th (5.45.7, 5.45.8) Mandalas (Books of the Rig Veda). Sarama means the fortunate one, the loved one and the one with fortunate feet. Sarama is said to be the divine and celestial dog of Indra. In the Rig Veda (Vol.10, 108), Sarama retrieved the stolen cows from Panis, a class of demons who posed as a purohita and who were the enemies of Aryans. The conversation that struck between Panis and Sarama throws light upon dog's unshakable loyalty, devotion and sense of submission. Panis wickedly tries to entice Sarama by making alluring offerings but turning a blind eye to all offerings Sarama remains steadfast in her mission to retrieve the cows.

Further, Sarama is mentioned in other Vedic texts usually in connection with the Angirasas and is said to be bestowed with the highest realms of existence. In the Sukta of the Atri (5.45.8), she is said to

have found the herds by the path of the Truth. In the 31st hymn of the 3rd Mandala of Rig Veda, Brahmarishi Vishwamitra describes Sarama as “the knowing one”, suggesting her heightened spiritual intuitive powers. No wonder Dogs are often said to have the sixth sense. The Rig Veda (7.55.1-5) refers to a dog as “Vastospati” the protector of the house.

Atharva Veda (11.12.30) associates and portrays Rudra (A fearsome form of Shiva) as surrounded by dogs. This association of Rudra with dogs is carried forward to the pre-Vedic age where Shiva’s another fearsome aspect Bhairava comes to fore.

In the 10th Mandala of Rig Veda, the son’s of Sarama (Shyama and Sabala) are referred to as the messengers of Yama. They are described as guardians to the path of heaven, protecting man on their path. This explains why a dog’s ability to infer death and have a prior vision of death is popular across the lengths and breaths of the globe.

Bhagvata Purana refers to Sarama as one of the 13 daughters of Prajapati Daksh. She was later married to Rishi Kashyap and became the mother of all carnivores and omnivores.

The Samhita texts such as the Vajasaneyi Samhita, the Kathaka, the Maitrayani Samhita and the Atharvaveda Samhita echo the Rig Vedic verses that glorify Sarama. Atharvaveda Samhita also describes Sarama as the deity of all dogs.

Texts such as the Taittiriya Brahmana and Apastamba Shrauta Sutra narrate that Sarama, the "goddess in guise of a dog", was deputed by Indra to roam in the mortal world, where she saw starving people and the divine cow who gave away her milk as a mother to humans and animals. Sarama, thus created water to sustain food and led the water to flow in fields.

The glory of dogs can also be found in the great epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Uttarkhanda of Ramayana (Ch 60-61) Sri Rama, an avatara of Vishnu punishes a Brahmin for beating a Saramaya (Dog), the descendant of Sarama without any reason.

To the surprise of many, the Mahabharata begins and ends with a dog. It starts with the story of Janmejaya and his three brothers who were all set to perform a sacrificial ceremony in order to kill all the snakes. Just as they were about to begin a pup appeared and the three brothers beat him up mercilessly. The injured puppy, went crying to its mother and narrated the incident. The mother of the injured pup went to the site of ceremony and questioned the three brothers. “Why was my son beaten up when he had committed no crime?” asked the mother dog. The three brothers being guilty had nothing to say and thus, remained silent. The mother cursed the 3 brothers for beating up her innocent

child and said that soon a great tragedy would be encountered by them. Mahabharata also ends with a dog. According to the 'Mahaprasthanika parva', after Parikshit was pronounced the King of Hastinapura and Vajra as king of Indraprastha, the Pandavas decided to give up the world. First they went east where Arjuna abandoned his weapons, then south and then west to Dwarka, which is now under water. Finally, they turned northwards, where they crossed the Himalayas, the desert and Mount Meru. As they walked, a dog accompanied them. Draupadi along with the four Pandavas died one after another, leaving Yudhishtira and the dog. Indra appeared before Yudhishtira and offered him to enter the heaven. However, Yudhishtira refused to leave behind the dog, who was with him through thick and thin. Despite various enticements and offerings Yudhishtira maintained firm grounds of not entering the heaven without his dog. Seeing Yudhishtira's unyielding love and devotion the dog reveals himself as a Vishnu-the preserver and told him that he was put to test.

Before the starting of Mahabharat at the holy land of Kurukshetra and before Krishna gave the divine message of Bhagavat Gita, Arjuna prays to Devi Durga, who is referred to as Kokamukha, or dog-faced. This throws light upon the association between Goddess and canine. The Matsya Purana (179.17) enumerates the creation of the Sapta Matrikas (the seven mothers) which were created by Shiva. One of the seven mothers came to be called as- Kukkuti (Dog).

Both Ramayana and Mahabharata prohibit and denounce cruelty to dogs. They further forbid dog meat and declare the eater of dog meat as an outcast.

In Hindu tradition Bhairava is one of the most popular deities in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Bhairava is a fierce and wondering manifestation of Lord Shiva who is accompanied by a dog as his Vahana. In India many wondering sadhus and sanyasins who abandon their comfortable lives in search of the higher self are often seen accompanied with dogs as their companions. This may be because dogs can not only be wonderful companions but also protectors who can alarm us during any unforeseen circumstances. Dogs are also outstanding navigators and retrievers. If we look at the tantric traditions, there are sixty-four Bhairavas or Kshetrapalas. Each of these 64 Bhairavas are accompanied with a dog. The second day of Dipavali is celebrated as "Kukkur Tihar" in Nepal. On this day all dogs are worshiped. They are decorated with flowers and vermilion and are given mouth watering food. Through this festival dogs are not only revered as divine creations but are also thanked for their role as guards of our home, streets and of us. Bhairava is also regarded as the prime deity of the veterinarians. In Hinduism, Yama, the God of death, is believed to own two guard dogs, each of his dog has four eyes. The four eyes are a symbol of the four dishas/ direction conveying a message that you and your actions are being looked at from 4 directions. These dogs are said to watch over the gates of Naraka/ hell. Owing to this belief, kukkur tihar is also known as Naraka Chaturdashi or Bhoot Chaturdashi. It

is believed that dogs can foresee danger, especially they can forecast death and are thus worshiped on this day.

Khandoba, Mahadeva, Malhari or Martanda Bhairava is yet another form of Lord Shiva. This form of Shiva which is popularly known as Khandoba is revered and worshiped mainly in the Deccan plateau of India, especially in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana. He is the most popular Kuladaivat (family deity) in Maharashtra and especially to the Bhosle clan to which Shivaji belonged. He is depicted either in the form of a Lingam, or as an image of a warrior riding on a bull or a horse and is accompanied by a dog. He is the killer of Mani and Malla asuras and is the helper of his spouse Mahalsa and other. After extreme tapasya Mani and Malla were bestowed with a boon of invincibility from Brahma. Instead of positively using the boon, they began harassing and torturing the Rishis. The Sapta Rishis in order to be saved approached Shiva who assumed the form of Martanda Bhairava, or Khandoba, and fought the demons along with Paarvati. However, as they killed the demon and as the blood spilled on the ground, it created another demon. Finally Malhari's dog drank all the blood and the asuras came to an end. Khandoba was originally a folk deity, worshipped in Jejuri, Maharashtra, in the ninth–tenth centuries. Later, in the 15th-16th century his story was incorporated as the 'Malhari Mahatmya' in the Brahmanda Puran.

Dattatreya is an incarnation of Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesha born to sage Atri and Anasuya. Bhagavata Purana (1.3.6–13) pronounces Dattatreya as the sixth incarnations of Vishnu out of the 24 incarnations mentioned. Dattatreya is accompanied by four dogs, which symbolize the four Vedas and the 4 directions. Dattatreya worshipped in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Shankara Digvijaya also states the association of the four dogs with the Vedas. India's most pronounced philosopher Adi Shankaracharya who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta was on his way to the Ganga ghata in Varanasi along with his 4 disciples. Suddenly, a Chandala along with his 4 dogs appeared before him. Shankara asked the Chandala and his dogs to move away. Promptly, the Chandala asked Adi Shankaracharya, 'Who are you asking to move away? The soul, which is all-pervading, omnipresent, omniscient or this body? Is my body different from yours? How do you call yourself a gyani!' Adi Shankaracharya was stunned at the questions thrown on to him by the chandal, he immediately bowed down before the chandal. The Chandala and the dogs were revealed to Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya as Lord Shiva and the 4 Vedas. The Vedas, as the name suggests is a symbol of knowledge.

DOGS IN BUDDHISM

It is not merely Hinduism that puts dogs on a pedestal. Buddhism also speaks highly of dogs as divine beings. Many of the Bodhisattvas are said to be born as dogs. Buddha himself is said to be born as a dog in one of his previous births. From a Buddhist point of view, dogs, cats and all other animals and sentient life are equally precious. They all have Buddha Nature and have the potential to eventually become enlightened (Mahayana Buddhism). According to the doctrine of rebirth any human could be reborn as animal, and any animal could be reborn as a human. Gautama Buddha expounded that, sentient beings currently living in the animal realm have been our mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, children, friends in past rebirths. Thus, ultimately humans and animals were part of a single family. They are all interconnected.

According to the Jatakas, animals display characters of love, kindness and generosity. In few jatakas, the story revolves around an animal as the central character. Few other Jataka stories have animals and human relations as focal point. In the Kukkura Jataka No. 2, when Brahmdatta was the king of Banaras, Bodhisattva came to life as a dog, and dwelt in a great cemetery as the head of several hundred dogs. He stopped the mass killing of dogs in Banara. Brahmadutta was completely transformed after the preaching given by Bodhisattva and the king commanded that the lives of all creatures should be safe from harm. He ensured that all dogs from the Bodhisattva downwards, should have a constant supply of food just as he himself ate; and, abiding by the teachings of the Bodhisattva, he dedicated his life to charity and for the welfare of others. The 'Dog's Teaching' endured for ten thousand years. The Abhinha Jataka No. 27, narrates the story of a dog and an elephant who grew up to be great friends and became indispensable to each other. The playful dog used to swing on the elephant's trunk. One day the merchant sold the dog. The elephant stopped eating and went into depression until the dog was brought back. In Sunakha Jataka No. 242, Maha Kanha Jataka No. 469, Mahabodhi Jataka No. 528 and Maha Ummaga Jataka No. 546 dogs play an important and central role. Pañca-sikkhāpada refrains violence of any kind. Further, Monks were forbidden from intentionally killing an animal, or drinking water with living creatures (such as larvae) in it. Gautama Buddha walked through the country with a little dog. This little dog turned into a massive lion and frightened the robbers who tried to attack Gautama Buddha while he was meditating. In Lhasa, the capital of Tibet the dog's superiority depends on its resemblance to Buddha's lion-dogs. Hence, in this region a dog breed called Lhasa Apso is also known as the "Lions of Lhasa". These little dogs are considered divine and auspicious. Further, the Lhasa Apso is considered a holy omen in Buddhism and hence, one is refrained from buying and selling Lhasa Apsos. On special occasions, the Lhasa Apso is gifted as a holy and divine omen because it is believed that the bodies of the Lhasa Apsos could be

entered by souls of deceased lamas while they awaited rebirth into a new body. The Lhasa Apsos are especially kept in the Gompas and are made to hear Buddhist chants. China which is now an example of dog cruelty and dog meat was once kind to dogs and the Buddhist temples in China were guarded with statues of dogs having lion faces.

Asanga was a Buddhist Sage who saw a dog covered with maggots. These maggots were dwelling deeper into the wound and causing discomfort and pain to the dog. Asanga decided to relieve the dog by removing the maggots and placing them upon his own skin so that the dog would be cured and the maggots would also continue to live. However, he feared that if he used fingers to remove the maggots, he may end up hurting them or killing them. He finally decided to lick the maggots off the dog's body with his tongue. Just as his tongue touched the dog's wound, the dog disappeared, and in place of him appeared Maitreya, the future Buddha. Asanga asked Maitreya "I desired to see you for years but you never appeared before me and now when I have no desire left, you have appeared before me" Maitreya smiled and replied "It is only now, through your great act of compassion, that your mind is pure and therefore you are able to see me.....you did not realize that I was with you all along."

DOGS IN PAINTINGS AND ARCHITECTURE

Dogs are not just a part of our ancient texts but have significantly been a part of our culture, paintings, architecture etc. Dogs have been depicted in the most beautiful manner in prehistoric rock paintings that were found in the Indian Subcontinent as early as 30,000 years ago.

In the Singanpur rock paintings in Madhya Pradesh, we see a barking dog rushing towards its quarry. With its straightened tail and exaggerated leg motion, the painter has tried to accentuate the speed and action of the animal.

Pudumalai that stands proud in the state of Tamil Nadu at a stretch of 6 km from Usilampatti became witness to a prehistoric rock painting which included a hunting scene depicting a dog walking with a man. This painting was discovered by a team of archaeologists who were headed by KT Gandhirajan. At a few Stone Age sites in Tamil Nadu, we can also see depictions of hunting parties accompanied by dogs going about their work. This is clear evidence that dogs were domesticated even as early as the Stone age. These representations are, of course, styled and dramatized and thus, they do not give us any idea about the breed of the dogs.

The frescoes of Ajanta and Elora are also home to some of the earliest representations of dogs. These frescoes date back to the second century BCE. Dog frescoes were also excavated by the Kings of the

Vakataka dynasty. The excavation was carried out from a series of caves in the valley along the Waghora River and decorated the interior walls and ceilings of it.

There are a minimum of three frescoes from the pre-Christian era in the caves of Ajanta and Elora that represent the hunting dogs. Cave I of Ajanta and Elora narrates the story of Janaka through the frescoes in comic-strip style. When his wife finds that he has eaten food discarded by a dog, she leaves him in disgust. Cave XVII features dogs that tell a story from the Buddhist Mriga Jataka about a queen who wants a golden deer. Another scene at the caves which is popularly known as “The Return of the King”, the king goes on in order to capture a golden deer and returns with the same in his chariot. Humans with dogs on leashes are seen following the chariot. In this depiction, a pack of four similar-looking dogs can be seen on leashes.

Buddhist Sutasoma Jataka, tells a tale about Sudasa, the king of Varanasi, who sets out on a hunt with his pack of dogs. As a reflection of love and respect for animals, Buddhist artists paid a lot of attention to detail while depicting these dogs in the Ajanta murals. They look beautiful, elite, brown coloured with well defined body, head, paws, ears and tail.

In a painting that finds mention in Baburnama, depicts Khusrau Shah paying homage to Babur along with a Tazi dog. Tazi dog belongs to Afghanistan. Two greyhounds add to the beauty of yet another painting that came into existence during King Jahangir’s reigns. The painting shows bond between a beggar and his dogs despite his social and financial position. In yet another Rajasthani painting that dates back to 1707-1708 and depicts Maharana Amar Singh II in his garden in Udaipur, one can clearly see the presence of two hounds that wear jewel studded collars representing that dogs have been associated with royalty. Hence, from paintings one can clearly see that dogs have been with us through royalty, poverty and otherwise.

DOGS IN INDIAN POETRY AND LITERATURE

Not only dogs have been mentioned a number of times in the Vedas, Puranas and epics but they also are a part of contemporary Indian poetry. Rabindranath Tagore, the name who redefined poetry, art and music and became the first non-European to be bestowed with the Nobel Prize wrote a wonderful poem on dogs called “This Dog”. In this poem Rabindranath Tagore addresses the dog as the “only living being” who alone is capable of unconditional love and sacrifices. Further, Faiz Ahmad Faiz talks in his Poem “Dogs” about the noble nature of Dogs and the savage humans. Amrita Pritam in her Poem “The Street Dog” fondly talks about her own experience with a street dog, the poem touches the inner most core of the reader. Not only have Indian poets written soul touching poems for dogs but dogs

have also been a subject of poetry for many western poets like Alexander Pope (I am his Highness' dog at Kew'(1688-1744)), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (To Flush, My Dog, 1806-61), Emily Dickinson (A little Dog that wags his tail), Ogden Nash (The Dog).

CONCLUSION:

Dogs have contributed to every spec of our history, culture, literature and art from time immemorial. Despite their contribution and unconditional love, they stand in despair with questioning eyes as to why are they being cruelly man handled? Their pitiful condition in Kerala and other parts of the country is an epitome of cruelty and inhumanity. If we let this cruelty continue, that day isn't far away when human himself will not hesitate in being cruel to fellow humans. We belong to the culture where divinity is said to exist in each spec and we are motivated to expand our consciousness and realize in it each cell of this universe. Why then have we parted ways with this all encompassing philosophy? Is it not our duty to protect those who are weaker, less fortunate and in need? Have we forgotten the message of Mahatma Gandhi, who said that "the greatness of a country is evident in the way its animals are treated". Is it not time to rewind and go back into the past, so that we may be witness to the glories of dogs and are able to give them their due respect and their share of love in the present and in future times to come? It is time to not hit any but heal, it is time to not deprive any but to give.....it is time to realize that all that is created has his/her special role to play. We cannot cut away the part from the whole because when the part is unhappy and deprived the whole also remains unhappy and deprived. When we seek happiness, love and compassion, we ought to give happiness love and compassion.

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